
CHAPTER ONE

Purpose and Need

1. PURPOSE AND NEED

The Cities of Henderson and Las Vegas, Nevada, form one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States. The well-known lights of The Strip are now surrounded by a rapidly expanding urban and suburban metropolitan area of homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Yet immediately on the edges of this expansion, much of the land is open and undeveloped. This constantly changing interface of urban and natural settings provides unique challenges and opportunities for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Las Vegas Field Office, which manages public lands composing much of this open space.

The purpose of the Sloan Canyon NCA is as follows:

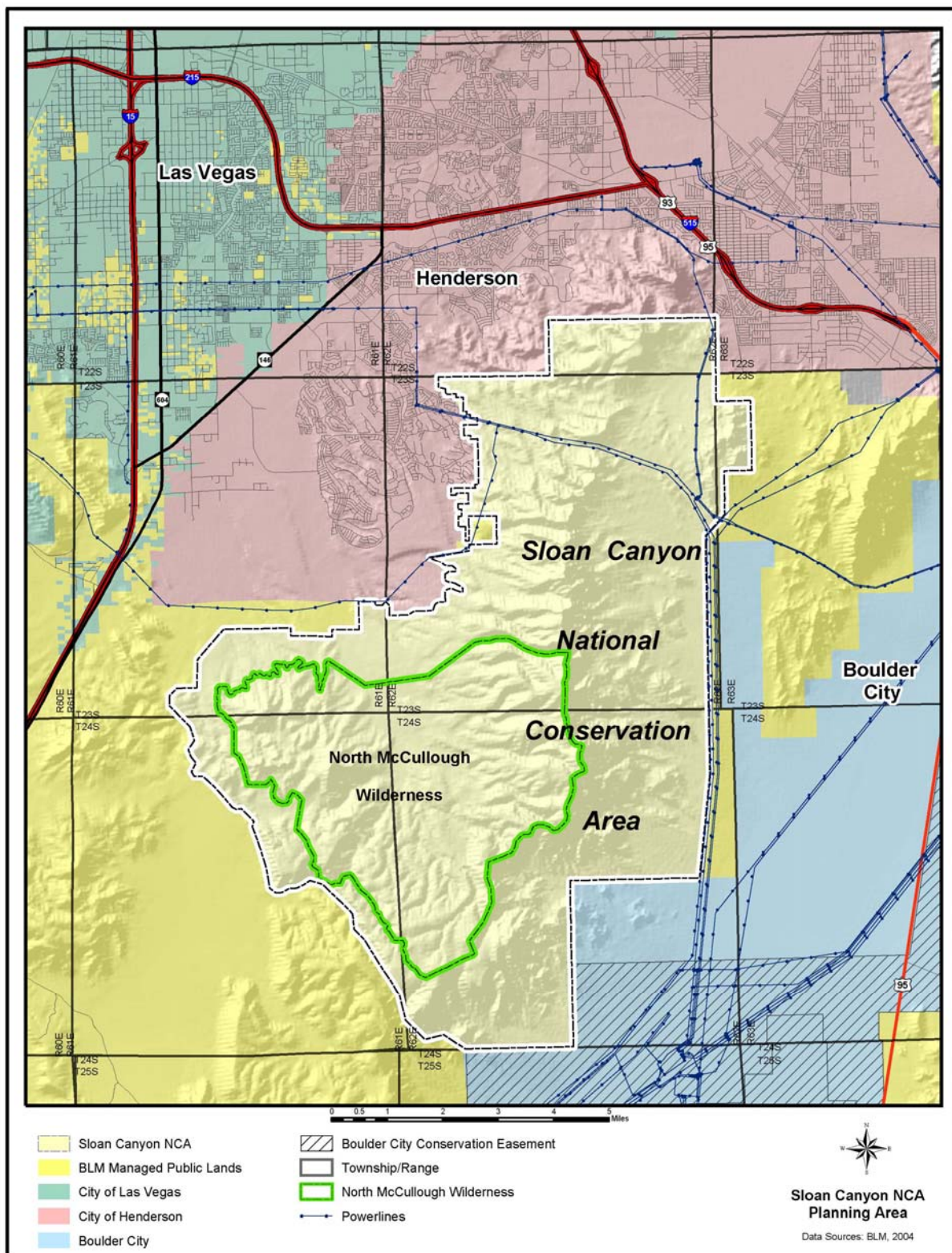
“ . . . to conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations the cultural, archaeological, natural, wilderness, scientific, geological, historical, biological, wildlife, educational, and scenic resources of the [Sloan Canyon] Conservation Area.”

In November 2002, Congress designated the Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area (NCA) to preserve and protect a portion of southern Nevada’s Mojave Desert as a permanent asset for future generations. The Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (the Clark County Act) established the Sloan Canyon NCA and the North McCullough Wilderness, which is entirely contained within the NCA (see Figure 1.1). The 48,438-acre NCA, which forms the natural, mountainous southern skyline of the City of Henderson and Las Vegas, contains unique scenic and important archaeological sites. The centerpiece of the NCA is the Sloan Canyon Petroglyph Site, one of the most significant cultural resources in southern Nevada. More than 300 rock art panels with nearly 1,700 designs represent native cultures dating from the Archaic to historic era. Eventually, residential housing, schools, parks, and businesses will border much of the northern and western edges of the NCA.

Title VI of the Clark County Act, hereafter referred to as the Sloan Canyon NCA Act (Appendix A), requires BLM to develop a plan for the appropriate use and management of the NCA and Wilderness within 3 years of enactment. The BLM Las Vegas Field Office in collaboration and communication with other federal and state agencies, local governments, affected Native American tribes, and the public is conducting this planning effort.

This Proposed Resource Management Plan (PRMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is the culmination of nearly 3 years of intense, systematic work by BLM, cooperating agencies, and a third-party contractor to develop an approach for managing the NCA. The approach incorporates the vision of the NCA, which is to protect its valuable resources while allowing as wide a range of activities as reasonable. This PRMP was prepared, in part, based on the comments provided by the public, tribes, and federal, state, and local governments on the Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which compared a range of management alternatives and identified their associated environmental consequences. This PRMP contains mainly those components of the Draft RMP/EIS that are essential to providing a concise and focused description of the proposed management plan. Following a 30-day protest period for the PRMP and after the 60-day Governor’s consistency review, a Record of Decision (ROD) would be prepared and published and the RMP approved. Once adopted, this RMP would amend the *Proposed Las Vegas Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Las Vegas RMP)* (BLM 1998a) and be a stand-alone land use plan for all lands within the NCA. This PRMP is anticipated to provide guidance for planning and management actions for the next 15 to 20 years.

Figure 1.1. Sloan Canyon NCA Planning Area



This PRMP contains management direction related to both general “land use planning” decisions and “implementing” decisions. The land use planning decisions establish goals and objectives for managing the NCA’s resources, as well as associated actions and uses. Implementation decisions, on the other hand, constitute BLM’s final approval for on-the-ground actions to proceed. For example, implementation decisions can determine the design, development, and designation of roads, trails, and visitor centers, or authorize vegetation restoration projects.

Anyone who participated in the RMP process and has an interest that may be adversely affected may protest the land use planning decisions contained in the PRMP (43 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1610.5-2). Protests may raise only those issues that were submitted for the record during the planning process. Protests must be submitted to the BLM Director after the PRMP is published and prior to the issuance of the ROD. After that time, there is no further opportunity for decision review or administrative remedies for protest resolution. Unlike land use decisions, implementation decisions are not subject to protest but are subject to administrative remedies and review, primarily through appeals to the Office of Hearings and Appeals (BLM 2004a). Additional information on the protest and appeals process can be found in the Dear Reader Letter that accompanies this PRMP. The Summary of the Management Direction (Table ES-1) indicates which actions are land use and which are implementation.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Sloan Canyon NCA Act directs the Secretary of the Interior, through BLM, to manage the Sloan Canyon NCA in a manner that conserves, protects, and enhances the Conservation Area’s resources for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The purpose of the Sloan Canyon NCA Act is to conserve, protect, and enhance the cultural, archaeological, natural, wilderness, scientific, geological, historical, biological, wildlife, educational, and scenic resources, which are important reasons for the establishment of the NCA. The designation of the North McCullough Wilderness, administered under the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Clark County Act, Title II (“Wilderness Areas”) (Appendix A), requires that 14,763 acres within the NCA be preserved and protected in their natural, primitive condition.

The Sloan Canyon NCA Act and the Clark County Act, Title II (“Wilderness Areas”), sets a number of ground rules for the development of a management plan for the NCA and the Wilderness, including the following:

- **Uses**—Allow only such uses of the NCA that conserve, protect, and enhance the Conservation Area’s resources
- **Motorized Vehicles**—Designate roads and trails for motorized vehicle use; all others would be closed except for administrative or emergency purposes
- **North McCullough Road and Trail Right-of-Way (ROW)**—Recommend a location for a ROW to provide the City of Henderson rural roadway access to the NCA
- **Non-Motorized Trails**—Convey to the City of Henderson two ROWs for nonmotorized trails
- **NCA Funding**—Sell nearby public land to fund the conservation and management of the NCA, including the construction of facilities and research on archaeological and geological resources
- **Litter Cleanup Plan**—Develop a litter cleanup plan and public lands awareness campaign

- **Grazing**—Allow permitted grazing to continue, subject to all applicable laws, regulations, and executive orders
- **Mineral Rights**—Withdraw all lands from mineral exploration, leasing, and development, subject to valid and existing rights
- **Hunting**—Maintain the State of Nevada jurisdiction with respect to hunting and trapping, although they may be restricted in designated areas and periods for safety or administrative reasons.

The Sloan Canyon NCA Act also declared that no buffer zones or limitations on uses of land outside the NCA may be established, and the Clark County Act, Title II (“Wilderness Areas”) contains directives for management of all 18 wilderness areas designated by the Act, including the North McCullough Wilderness.

BLM, through discussions with cooperating agencies and based on input received during the public scoping process, and the direction, intent, and spirit of the Sloan Canyon NCA Act, developed the following vision for managing the NCA:

Vision

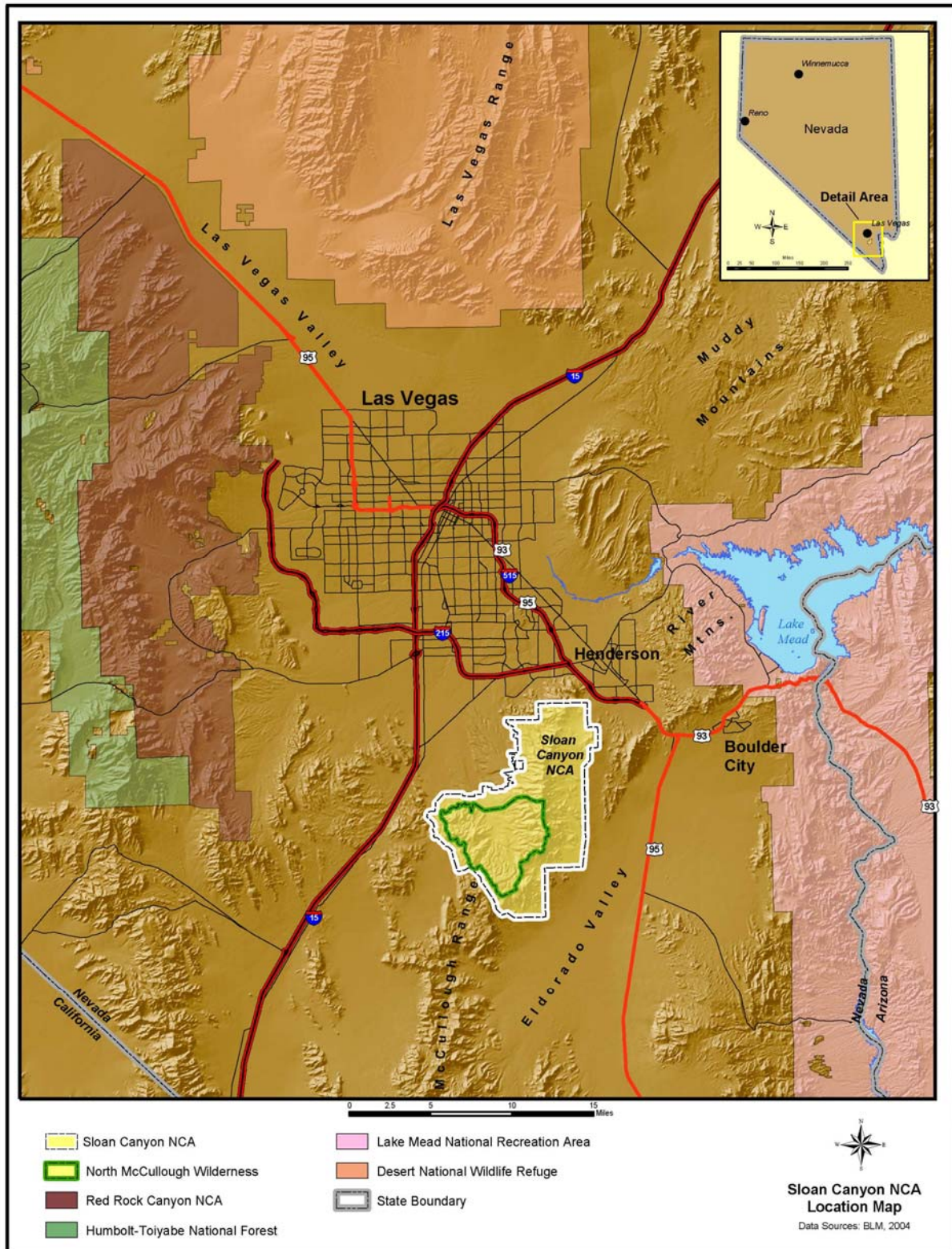
The BLM will manage the Sloan Canyon NCA to preserve, protect, and enhance the area’s cultural features and natural resources and wilderness values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations by—

- Protecting the Sloan Canyon Petroglyph Site and respecting the canyon for its importance to Native Americans
- Providing education on the importance of preserving and protecting the area’s cultural, natural, and wilderness values
- Providing information and education on Sloan Canyon NCA’s resources in a creative manner
- Providing recreational opportunities that are compatible with and protect the various elements of the natural landscape.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

The Sloan Canyon NCA encompasses the northern portion of the McCullough Range, lies southeast of the City of Las Vegas, and borders the City of Henderson (Figure 1.2). Volcanoes formed the McCullough Range and a long basalt spine dominates the topography within the NCA. The eastern slopes of the range are much steeper than the western slopes and the ridgeline offers excellent views of

Figure 1.2. Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area Location Map



the Las Vegas Valley, numerous mountains, and the Eldorado and Jean Dry Lakes. Elevations within the NCA range from approximately 1,800 feet on the southern border to 5,000 feet at Black Mountain.

Archaeological evidence suggests that humans have used the NCA resources for nearly 7,000 years. Sloan Canyon, located within the southwestern portion of the NCA, contains more than 1,700 rock art elements within a half-mile stretch of canyon. Although cultural affiliation has not been determined for each panel, archaeologists studying Sloan Canyon believe it has been used by many previous cultures. An ethnographic study completed for the RMP and ongoing consultation with tribes have confirmed the cultural significance of the Sloan Canyon Petroglyph Site to present-day area Native Americans. The Sloan Canyon Petroglyph Site has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1978. In addition to Sloan Canyon Petroglyph Site, cultural resources inventories identified 19 other rock art sites in and around the NCA but none have the quantities of elements nor are they as elaborate as in Sloan Canyon.

The McCullough Range is located in the Mojave Desert near the confluence of two geographic zones, the Colorado Plateau and the Great Basin. This setting plays a major role in the natural characteristics of the NCA. The primary ecosystem in northern portion of the McCullough Range is Mojave Desert scrub, which is dominated by creosote and bursage with scattered stands of cholla cactus in varying densities depending on elevation. The Blue Diamond cholla, considered a potential candidate species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is also found within the NCA. Small communities of unique and isolated vegetation types, including several Special Status Species of beardtongue, exist within canyon and wash microclimates.

Although essentially only one ecosystem type is represented, the NCA supports a variety of wildlife, including desert bighorn sheep, mountain lions, Gila monsters, and the threatened desert tortoise. Two artificial wildlife water locations (guzzlers) are located within the NCA. These guzzlers were developed through the cooperative efforts of BLM, the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), and private conservation groups interested in improving habitat for bighorn sheep and other wildlife species.

Recreation is becoming an important use of the North McCullough Range. As urban growth in the Las Vegas Valley has enveloped the northern portion of the NCA, hiking, mountain biking, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use have become more prevalent. This is in contrast to the southern portion of the NCA, which contains the North McCullough Wilderness. Because of its rugged character, this southern portion receives little visitation and opportunities abound for solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation.

Because of the NCA's proximity to Las Vegas, about 40 ROWs were on file in the BLM Las Vegas Field Office when the NCA was designated. These ROWs are primarily for power lines, flood control facilities, access roads, and communication equipment. Although the Sloan Canyon NCA Act withdraws the NCA and wilderness from mining entry and the establishment of new claims, 11 existing mining claims were located within the NCA boundary at the time of enactment.

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The purpose of the RMP is to provide the BLM Las Vegas Field Office with a comprehensive framework for managing the NCA, and the North McCullough Wilderness. The RMP is a public, detailed document that defines management policies and actions on these lands. The RMP—

- Specifies where and under what circumstances particular activities would be allowed within the NCA

- Updates the existing management policies for lands within the NCA, including the Wilderness, and the resource allocations affecting the NCA, consistent with the spirit and intent of the Sloan Canyon NCA Act
- Incorporates available new data
- Resolves issues identified during public scoping
- Integrates or modifies uses of public land that have occurred since the *Las Vegas RMP* (BLM 1998a)
- Provides public land management measures in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 United States Code [U.S.C.] 1701 et seq.), BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook, and other existing statutes, regulations, and policy.

The RMP is needed for the following reasons:

- To comply with the Sloan Canyon NCA Act, Title VI of the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (16 U.S.C. 1132, Public Law 107-282), which established the NCA. The legislation mandates that BLM consult with the State of Nevada, the City of Henderson, Clark County, and any other interested persons to develop a management plan for the conservation area.
- To comply with BLM National Landscape Conservation System policy. All NCAs are required to have a stand-alone RMP that consolidates all land use plans and implementation or activity plans relevant to the planning area (BLM Instruction Bulletin No. 2001-022, February 22, 2002).

The implementation of this RMP constitutes a major federal action and is therefore subject to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), which requires federal agencies to consider environmental consequences in the decisionmaking process. The President's Council on Environmental Quality issued regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, including provisions on the content and the procedural aspects of the required environmental analysis (40 CFR 1500). The most comprehensive level of analysis is an EIS—the level being applied to the Sloan Canyon NCA RMP.

1.4 THE PLANNING PROCESS

BLM develops plans to protect resources and to guide management of the public lands and resources. These land use plans and associated decisions are the basis for every on-the-ground action BLM undertakes, and they ensure management strategies comply with laws, regulations, and guidelines. The BLM has three primary levels of land use planning decisions—RMP level, activity level, and site-specific level. This PRMP focuses on broad resource objectives and direction, while providing some activity-level guidance and some site-specific decisions.

BLM's multistep planning process (described in 43 CFR 1600) was used to develop this plan, which represents the culmination of prior Sloan Canyon planning activities, including extensive public and cooperating agency involvement. In accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and FLPMA, the RMP was developed through an open, collaborative public process and was based on public input solicited throughout the planning effort. For example, input received on the Draft

RMP/EIS was considered and incorporated, as appropriate, in this PRMP. The planning process is described in greater detail below; in Chapter 5, Consultation and Coordination, and presented in Figure 1.3.

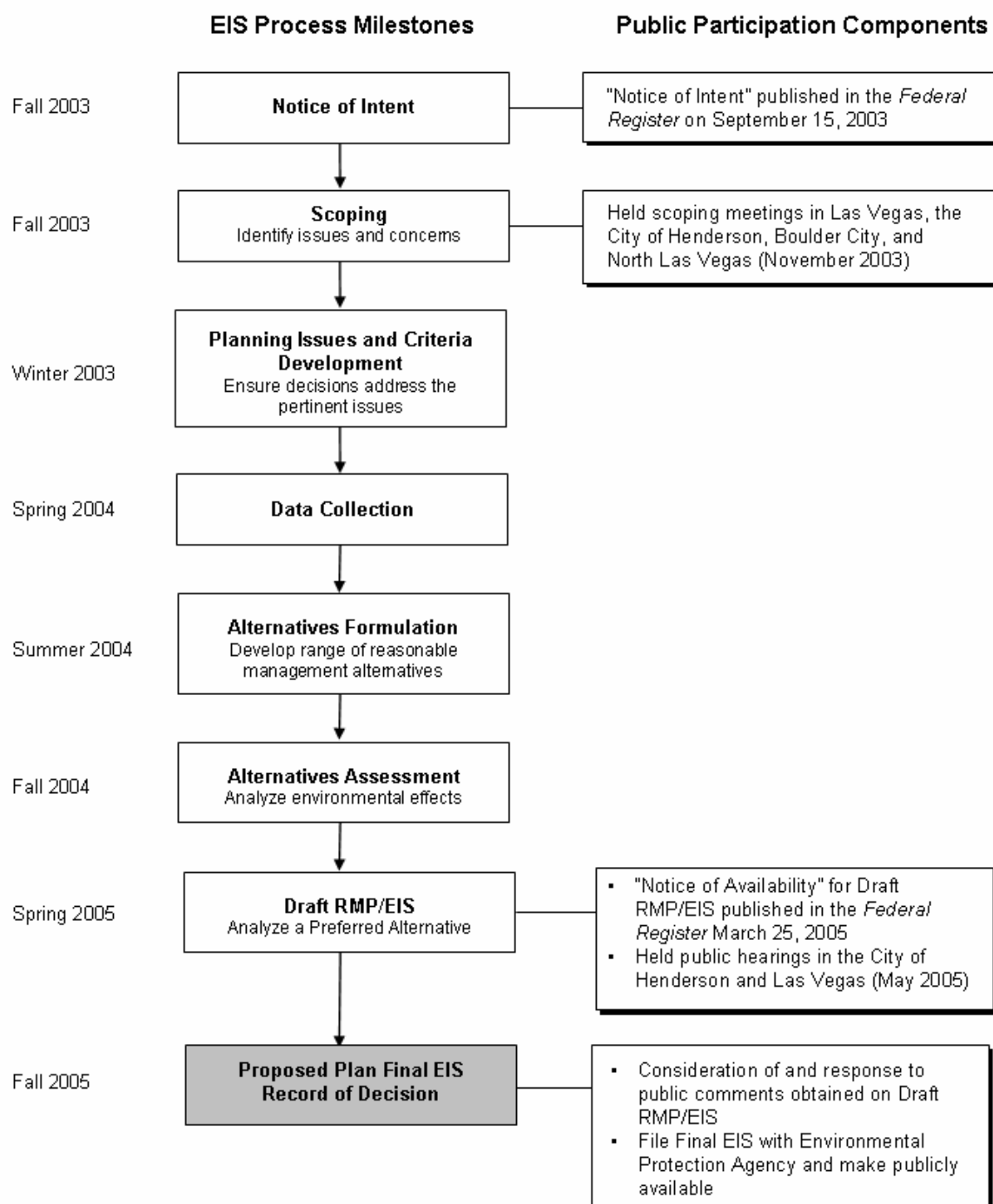
1.4.1 Planning Issues

The process for developing the PRMP for the Sloan Canyon NCA and North McCullough Wilderness began with identifying issues regarding perceptions of how the area should be managed. The issues identified by stakeholders and interested parties for the Sloan Canyon NCA relate directly to requirements of the Sloan Canyon NCA Act and the Clark County Act, Title II (“Wilderness Areas”), or resource management and land use planning. Although these issues received special attention during the development of the RMP, other basic environmental and management considerations were also incorporated into the plan to provide comprehensive management guidance for all resources and to satisfy legal requirements.

Six overarching planning issues were identified in the Baseline Assessment of the Needs and Issues for Developing a Management Plan for the Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area (BLM 2003a). These issues were reinforced and expanded by the public, tribes, and State and local government cooperators through the scoping process:

- How will the cultural, natural, and wilderness resources of the Sloan Canyon NCA and the North McCullough Wilderness be preserved for current and future generations?
- How will the cultural, natural, and wilderness resources be interpreted for visitors to the NCA and non-visitors who may have an interest in learning more about the resources?
- How will visitors’ activities and uses be managed in a manner that preserves the cultural, natural, and wilderness resources while providing reasonable access to and enjoyment of the NCA?
- How will management of the Sloan Canyon NCA be integrated in a manner that is compatible with the plans and needs of Native American tribes, the City of Henderson, Clark County, and other local, state, and federal agencies?
- What facilities and infrastructure are needed to provide visitor services, information, and administration of the NCA?
- How will the management plan be responsive to changing conditions, stemming primarily from a larger urban interface, to ensure the long-term protection of the area’s resources?

Figure 1.3. Sloan Canyon Planning Process



1.4.2 Planning Criteria

BLM regulations guiding the development of RMPs require the preparation of planning criteria (43 CFR 1610). These criteria guide the development of the plan and ensure that it is tailored to the identified issues and that unnecessary data collection is avoided. The criteria are based on standards prescribed by applicable law and regulations; agency guidance; consultation and coordination with the public and federal, tribal, state, and local agencies and entities; analysis of information pertinent to the NCA; and professional judgment of the BLM planning team.

The planning criteria developed for this RMP fall into two categories— laws and regulations, and policy statements. The legal and regulatory criteria are based, in part, on the Sloan Canyon NCA Act and current management direction for the public lands included within the NCA, including the *Las Vegas RMP* (BLM 1998a) and detailed activity plans, such as the *1998 BLM Las Vegas Field Office Fire Management Activity Plan* (BLM 1998b). These planning criteria are listed in Appendix A, Enabling Legislation and Management Guidance.

1.5 RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATION, AND POLICY

This PRMP was completed in accordance with all applicable federal statutes and regulations including the Sloan Canyon NCA Act, the Clark County Act, Title II (“Wilderness Areas”) (Appendix A), as well as state and local laws and regulations.

1.6 CONSISTENCY WITH BLM AND OTHER AGENCY PLANS

BLM planning regulations require that RMPs be consistent, to the extent possible, with officially approved resource-related plans of other federal agencies, state and local governments, and Native American tribes. Other agencies’ plans relevant to the Sloan Canyon NCA include, in part, the *City of Henderson Master Plan* and the *Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan*. As part of the collaborative planning process used to develop this PRMP, representatives from the City of Henderson, Boulder City, Clark County, NDOW, State Historic Preservation Office, and Native American tribes contributed considerable time and input into ensuring that the actions and impacts contained in this document are consistent with their respective plans and policies. Chapter 5 provides a detailed description of the collaboration process for the development of this PRMP.

The Sloan Canyon PRMP builds on a long history of management, planning, and implementation within the Las Vegas Field Office, including the *Las Vegas RMP* (BLM 1998a). Additional guidance has been provided by activity-level management plans covering such topics as wildlife, wildland fire, and grazing. The completed RMP would supersede all previous plans for the public lands within the Sloan Canyon NCA.

1.7 RESOURCE-SPECIFIC PLANS FOR THE NCA

As part of this planning process, the following resource-specific plans and strategies were developed to provide resource-specific management guidance:

Recreation Monitoring Plan (Appendix B)—Contains the monitoring approach that would be used in the Sloan Canyon NCA to ensure that management actions meet the recreation management goals and objectives described in this PRMP

North McCullough Wilderness Management Plan (Appendix C)—Provides the detailed management guidance to implement actions selected as part of this PRMP for the North McCullough Wilderness over the next 10 years

Cultural Resources Management Plan (Appendix D)—Provides key elements for the management of cultural resources during the first stage of NCA implementation

Interpretive Strategy and Environmental Education Strategy (Appendix F)—Clarifies and sets direction for the Interpretive and Educational Program at the Sloan Canyon NCA

Litter Cleanup Plan and Public Lands Awareness Campaign (Appendix G)—Provides cleanup actions and management priorities to help ensure that an effective anti-litter message is delivered and to eventually result in a litter-free NCA

Vegetation Restoration Strategy (Appendix H)—Developed to improve vegetation community conditions in the Sloan Canyon NCA through the restoration of existing disturbances and the management and control of future disturbances.

Biological Management Strategy (Appendix I)—Contains a general management strategy to help maintain the ecological integrity and biodiversity of the NCA

Biological Assessment (Appendix L)—Addresses the biological impacts of the proposed management actions on the federally listed species identified in the PRMP and provides mitigation actions.

1.8 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Implementation of the RMP would begin when the Nevada State Director signs the RMP Record of Decision. This implementation would be accomplished as described in the BLM Handbook H-1617-1. During implementation of the RMP, additional documentation, such as those required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, may be necessary. Site-specific compliance with cultural resource and threatened and endangered species laws and regulations would be required for the siting and construction of trails and visitor facilities. Environmental assessments can vary from a simple statement of conformance with the ROD to more complex documents that analyze several alternatives.

Implementation of the RMP would be monitored and the plan would be evaluated periodically. Revisions or amendments to the RMP may be necessary to accommodate changes in resource needs, policies, or regulations.